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ABSTRACT

A description is given of South Carolina's principal apprenticeship program to train future administrators. The program focuses on two key elements: a set of field-based experiences planned to meet the specific needs of the apprentice, and a one-to-one mentor-apprentice relationship. Apprentices receive experiences in seven areas: (1) curriculum and instruction; (2) staff personnel; (3) pupil personnel; (4) school law; (5) school plant; (6) budget and finance; and (7) community relations. The program provides an opportunity for the apprentice to develop generic management skills such as planning, problem solving, decisionmaking, organizing, and controlling. (JD)

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The Principal Apprenticeship:

An Opportunity for Leadership Development

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By

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South Carolina Department of Education

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The Principal Apprenticeship:
An Opportunity for Leadership Development

In 1984 the South Carolina legislature passed the Education Improvement Act (EIA). One component of the Act was a mandate to provide a principal apprenticeship program to train future outstanding administrators. This mandate became a part of the EIA because both educators and legislators recognized that little was being done to prepare individuals to assume the responsibilities of the principalship. In addition, the effective school research emphasized the need to have competent, effective principals in order to have good schools.

Prior to forming the legislation, research was done to select the most appropriate delivery system for training future administrators. The apprenticeship model was chosen since it contains many elements that are considered to be "best practices" for teaching and learning. These include (1) one-to-one instruction, (2) learning through example, (3) practice makes permanent, and (4) time for skill mastery. In addition, apprenticing has been a tried and true method for teaching many of our nation's trades and professions.

The responsibility for planning and operating the apprenticeship program fell to the Leadership Academy within the South Carolina Department of Education. In the fall of 1984, the Academy implemented a program designed to accomplish the following three goals:

(1) To assist public school districts in selecting and training outstanding future administrators;

(2) To allow aspiring school principals with identified potential the opportunity to develop needed competencies; and

(3) To provide the opportunity for participants to experience the realities of school administration in a field setting under the guidance of an experienced mentor.

The heart of the program focuses on two key elements. The first is a set of field-based experiences planned to meet the specific needs of the apprentice. The second is a one-to-one mentor-apprentice relationship.

The Department requires that apprentices receive experiences in seven areas. These include, but are not limited to, curriculum and instruction, staff personnel, pupil personnel, school law, school plant, budget and finance, and community relations. In addition, the apprenticeship must be structured so that the intern has the opportunity to develop generic management skills such as planning, problem solving, decision making, organizing, and controlling. The apprentice must also have opportunities for personal growth and development in such areas as communication skills, assertiveness training, and stress management.

The second key element is the mentor-apprentice relationship. Each district selects as a mentor a principal who has been successful and who is willing to devote the necessary time to providing guidance to the apprentice. The mentor's major responsibilties are to serve as the primary trainer for the apprentice, to monitor progress, and to provide feedback on a regular basis. The mentor is also required to participate in State Department of Education sponsored staff development activities to assist with the mentoring role. The mentor-apprentice relationships which appear to be the most beneficial are those in which the mentor encourages open and frequent communications and where the apprentice works closely with the mentor in all aspects of the school's administration and operation.

In the spring of each year, the State Department notifies districts of the program and sends applications to those wishing to participate. Each district determines it's own selection criteria. However, districts usually examine, through written and interview processes, an individual's career achievements,

job performance, professional goals, personal motivation, and writing skills. Once the candidates are selected, an application is submitted to the State Department.

Grants are allocated to school districts so that a pro-rata share of apprenticeships go to elementary, middle, and high schools and also to large (10,000+), medium (5,000+), and small school districts. The department also requires signed assurances from each district stating that they will abide by certain state guidelines. Districts must ensure that the apprentice will serve in that capacity on a full time basis (190 days for $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours per day), and that he/she is not filling a state required position. In addition, priority is also given to high performing assessment center graduates.

Grants for the 1988-89 school year are in the amount of $15,114, and they may be used only to fund a portion of the apprentice's salary. The grant amount has continued to increase each year from the $10,000 awarded in 1984-85.

In August, the State Department of Education conducts an orientation session for both mentors and apprentices. At this session, they receive training in their respective roles, and they also receive a notebook of materials explaining guidelines and procedures and containing a self-assessment instrument.

Following this session, the apprentice completes the self-assessment instrument to determine his/her strengths and weaknesses. Based on this analysis and on any other available data, the apprentice, the mentor, and the district supervisor jointly plan the apprentice's activities for the year and prepare a corresponding job description. The apprentice then spends the year in the mentor's school carrying out the specified activities and maintaining a log of his/her experiences. On two occasions during the year, State Department of Education staff makes site visits to provide technical assistance to both

apprentices and mentors and to monitor adherence to state guidelines. Department staff also makes available information about various staff development topics that would be beneficial to apprentices.

At the year's end, each apprentice completes a self-evaluation and also evaluates the program. Mentors also evaluate the program as well as the apprentice's performance. Revisions or adjustments to the program are made as necessary. Apprentices and mentors alike have found the program to be most beneficial and have made many positives remarks. The following statements are typical of those received:

"This is the best program the State Department of Education has ever had."

"I found all areas of the PAP to be extremely helpful and appropriate."

"This has been the best year I have ever spent in education. I hate it has to end."

"She has been a tremendous asset to me and the school."

The program's benefits are many. School districts have the opportunity to observe potential school principals demonstrating and performing on-the-job skills before making the critical employment decision for principal selection. As an added benefit, participating principals agree that their skills have been refined due to their roles as mentors.

One further indicator of the program's success is the fact that 70% of the past 152 apprentices are now in administrative positions.